

Kentucky Craft History and Education Association, Inc.

Interview with Marilyn Moosnick

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Interview conducted by Greg Willihnganz

WILLIHNGANZ: First maybe you could just tell us a little bit about where you were raised and what kind of environment you had and how it influenced your, your life later on.

MOOSNICK: Alright. Well, first of all, we came to Lexington from Indiana, from Jeffersonville, Indiana. As an only child my Mother, Dad and I came in 1933 to Lexington, when the Kentucky Utility Company moved its headquarters from Louisville, where my Dad had started working as a very young man, to Lexington. And, from then on, I've been an absolute provincial (laughs). I've been right here in Lexington, Kentucky, for seventy-five years. I...I was...went to Little Picadome School in the first and second grade, which was actually a two-room country school building. When I went to first and second grade it closed down very shortly after that (Laughing). But, that's where I got my first, my first and second grades under my belt. And then, to Picadome School, which was the old Picadome High School, and which had been abandoned when they built Lafayette High School. So, I was Picadome and Lafayette High School, and the University of Kentucky, and so on. So, in the first place, you know, I, I always had to give a lot of credit for my interest in the arts to both my mother and my dad. My dad was he...he drew beautifully. He was a...you know, he was the assistant secretary of the Kentucky Utilities. He was a bookkeeper by trade and he kept, you know, meticulous wonderful minutes for the Kentucky Utilities Company. But, he would draw me pictures of anything I wanted, a dog, a cat, a horse, little kids, and he was just marvelous at it. My mother was a school teacher, and she was a one-room country school teacher in Indiana. But, she was responsible for my taking piano lessons at a very early age. There was a little old rickety tick piano that she played in her school house with the kids...and she sang. So, she also bought a number of really beautiful art books for me. I can remember, you know, famous paintings and the world of art, and all that kind of thing, because I was never in an art museum until I was about to graduate from college.

WILLIHNGANZ: Wow.

MOOSNICK: Pretty...pretty sad, huh. In Lexington, Kentucky in the 30's and 40's it was truly a country town. It was very, very small, and it centered around the horse industry, the thoroughbred industry, with a very small faculty at the University of Kentucky making up another part of the population. But, it was...it was provincial. It was what I would consider to be unsophisticated, and inhabited by wonderful down-to-earth, down-home people. And, we were...we were in a part of town, in the south part of town, and in, you know, a very modest neighborhood. And, as all of my classmates and my schoolmates and friends and I grew up, we really had only the exposure that our schools could give us, and our parents could give us about things like the arts. So, I give my mother and dad a lot of credit for a tremendous interest in visual arts. And, I

realize it carried over, because I...I guess I call myself an art minor, a studio art minor at UK . I majored in Journalism, yes, and was mainly in the journalism department. But, I took so many arts classes, art history classes, and studio arts, from wonderful, wonderful people like Ray Barnhart, and, oh, Flip Amex, and Jan Sternbergs, who were just wonderful artists in themselves. So, I had almost as many credits as I needed to be an art major, exactly, but I don't consider myself an artist. Because I think if you are an artist you've got to make art. And, what became of me is that I just kept on appreciating art, and I made it an art form. How's that (Both laughing)?

WILLIHNGANZ: That's terrific.

MOOSNICK: Okay. But anyway, in the mean time, when I consider how Lexington was when I was a little girl, and what's open to little girls today, it's just all the difference in the world. Because for one thing, their parents are much more willing and able financially, and, and physically, and so forth, to take them to the Cincinnati Art Museum, or the Speed Museum in Louisville, or to take them to all of the downtown studios, and to take them to the University of Kentucky Art Museum, which of course did not exist when I was in college. But, the one thing that my mother did besides those piano lessons and the interest in art, was to see that I took ballet lessons, and from the first time that I really began to know what ballet was all about it's...it just meant a lot to me. I...I love ballet and I did continue in ballet until college, and then I became a member of the modern dance group at the University of Kentucky, and danced all through college. And after...for a time...until I started having all of those children and getting involved and everything...but it was a wonderful...a wonderful thing that I was actually able to experience very, very much. And I'll, I'll go see if whatever...if whatever, whether it's on the local level, and we've got very, I would say very admirable ballet here in Lexington for the size city. We are, and for the amount of money people are willing to give it, to support it, but I...from the best, from the very best ballet to the very rudimentary ballet. I love it when I see it.

WILLIHNGANZ: Well, that's terrific. You were instrumental in developing a number of organizations...the Guild and the fairs and the trains. How much did we get to talk about all those different things?

MOOSNICK: Well. We...we had talked about it. We talked about the beginning of the Guild, when Richard Bellando came to me and said, "We need so many things for this first show we're going to have in Berea, you know. What, what can you help us, can you help find a way that we can get some of the things." And I, we talked about that at length I think.

WILLIHNGANZ: Ok, and...

MOOSNICK: I will say though, about...about things that went on happening in, because we talked about all the building of peoples' interest in Kentucky crafts, in Kentucky artisans, and so forth, that when the Crafts Marketing Program of this state, which was funded as well as the Kentucky Arts Council...when the two of them, more or less, came together. And, the staffs really worked together collaboratively, and our budgets were more or less put together. You, you'll understand when I say that, that...that really was a wonderful putting together in everybody's mind of the fact that crafts and guild activities and artisans were...were every bit as much arts as any of the other more recognized art forms...the old classical art forms. What I would say were no more important than what our artists are doing right here in Kentucky, now, and I think that made a big statement. So, when the Holiday Market, for instance, was put into motion under Fran Redman, and a wonderful...that wonderful staff in the Crafts Marketing Program the Kentucky Arts Council backed it, and put a lot of emphasis on that Crafts Marketing...Holiday Market in Louisville...as a major outlet for sales of our Kentucky present day craftsmen and artisans. And, it...it's really been very important. People have come from all over...all over the country to take part in the...in the Holiday Market, and buy (Laughing), which is the ultimate, the ultimate result of it all.

WILLIHNGANZ: Ok. Maybe you could tell us a little bit about the awards that you've gotten because I know we missed those.

MOOSNICK: Well, putting awards in context with everything else we've talked about, I guess. It's...it's an important part of what makes everything move and makes everybody a part of the whole. Board members and volunteers in the arts don't expect any monetary remuneration, and they don't expect really anything, except just, maybe, appreciation from the people they're working with, that it really does make a difference to have them there, and that's true. I think you'd find any person who volunteers in the arts will say that, that's what's really important is to have the respect of your peers, the ones your working with, and I think probably the key right here, we just mentioned this a moment yesterday, or when we talked before, is that things really work best in the arts when the professionals, the art administrators, and the staffs of the agencies...then the entities that are, you know, presenting the arts. And, the volunteers, the board members...when these two entities truly respect each other and admire what each other is doing, and that the...that there are hardships involved on both sides, and that each one is just as important as the other to make the whole thing go. Then, I think, you've got it made. And, I think, that's what we've been working for all these years. And, it's what is working better and better in the arts, is this mutual respect or mutual admiration society between the administrators of art and the volunteers in the art. So, when somebody has worked a long time, because their peers have nominated them for an award, or something, that is what the award is really all about. So, I got a couple of

things to talk about, to let you understand what I'm saying. In the first place, back in '90...1996, at the end of '96 and in the beginning of 1997, I was leaving as the four year chair of the Kentucky Arts Council. And so, what the Arts Council had been doing, just in the last number of years, was giving every year a Governor's Award for Arts for artists themselves, for unities that supported arts, to arts administrators, and finally to arts volunteers...to people who have really supported the arts. So, in 1997, low and behold, I was nominated for the Kentucky Governor's Arts Award in a category of volunteer, and got the year's beautiful, beautiful piece, that is made every year by a different Kentucky artist. And, I'm very proud to say that I was given this gorgeous, very, very significant award to me that was actually created and made for all the winners that year by Ken Gastineau of Berea...an artist whose work I had admired for years. And so, to have this piece from him and from the Arts Council is really magnificent. And, when I tell you that I have proudly taken out of here this beautiful pin, which is the exact replica of the top of the award, and Ken's wonderful hands, in involving a beautiful stone, I can wear it with me proudly, wherever I go (Laughing). And, people ask me what it is. And so, I'm able to tell them that it was the Governor's Arts Award in 1997, by the Commonwealth of Kentucky. And, that really just is a very beautiful thing, and a part of it...the part that is, I know, this artist Ken, and love him very much, and the fact that the Arts Council wanted to give me that award...that's really the whole thing right there. So this, this past summer...just a total surprise, and more than I can tell you, just something that never in my life would I have expected, thought I deserved, just came about. And, it really did come about because our local Lexington Arts and Cultural Council, LEXARTS, as we call it, and the Executive Director Jim Clark nominated me for an Americans for the Arts Award, in a category that pretty much fits the award given before me as a volunteer, as a...as a person working in the...in the arts for the arts, and there again I received this award in Philadelphia in June of 2008, and I received at the same time, with five...four other...five individuals of us who were given the award in different categories and so there I was receiving an award...exact duplicate of an award that was given to Joan Mondale, Walter Mondale's widow...lovely woman...who was known in her time when she was working for the arts in the northern tier of the United States, as Joan of Arts (laughs). I love that, she was there to graciously receive her award, and at the same time, the man who really began the very first local arts organization in 1947. That's how many years before 1972, when we got started with our Lexington Arts Council, and he was also initially responsible for bringing into being Americans for the Arts, which is the major nationwide fundraising entity that supports greatly, and endorses, and just reinforces all of the work of the National Endowment for the Arts. So there I received it, but I received it because my local Lexington Arts administrator thought I deserved it. And that's what is the whole meaning of it to me. So, there you have it. Well, I guess I'd wrap all this up by saying, that recognition of people all over the country who have been doing so many things for all of the different arts agencies,

and the state agencies, and everything that we have going now is...is appreciated. And, I think that local arts organizations who do recognize all of their wonderful artists, and also their wonderful arts patrons, and volunteers, really are just making the whole operation of this world we have in the arts now, ever more important and exciting, and a thing to take part in.

WILLIHNGANZ: Thank you so much Marilyn that's terrific.